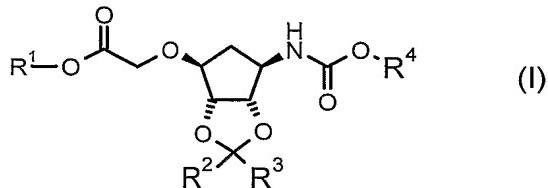
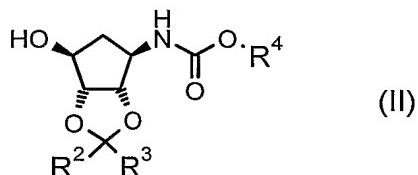


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CLAIMS

1. A process for the preparation of a compound of formula (I):



5 wherein R¹ is C₁₋₆ alkyl; R² and R³ are, independently, C₁₋₆ alkyl; and R⁴ is C₁₋₆ alkyl or benzyl (wherein the phenyl ring of benzyl is optionally substituted by nitro, S(O)₂(C₁₋₄ alkyl), cyano, C₁₋₄ alkyl, C₁₋₄ alkoxy, C(O)(C₁₋₄ alkyl), N(C₁₋₆ alkyl)₂, CF₃ or OCF₃); the process comprising reacting a compound of formula (II):



10 wherein R², R³ and R⁴ are as defined above, with a suitable base; and reacting the product so formed with R¹OC(O)CH₂X, wherein R¹ is as defined above and X is chloro, bromo or iodo; wherein the process is carried out in a suitable solvent at a temperature in the range -40°C to -5°C; and wherein at least 0.2 moles of the compound of formula (II) are used in the process.

- 15 2. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein R¹, R² and R³ are independently selected from C₁₋₄ alkyl.
3. A process as claimed in claim 1 or 2 wherein R¹ is ethyl.
4. A process as claimed in claim 1, 2 or 3 wherein R² and R³ are methyl.
5. A process as claimed in claim 1, 2, 3 or 4 wherein R⁴ is benzyl optionally substituted
20 by C₁₋₄ alkyl.
6. A process as claimed in claim 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 wherein R⁴ is unsubstituted benzyl.
7. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6 wherein X is bromo.
8. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 7 wherein the base is an alkyl metal C₁₋₆ alkoxide.
- 25 9. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 8 wherein the base is potassium tert-butoxide.

10. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 9 wherein the molar ratio of suitable base: $R^1O_2CCH_2X$: compound of formula (II) is (1 to 1.3):(1 to 1.3):1.
11. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 10 wherein the molar ratio of suitable base: $R^1O_2CCH_2X$: compound of formula (II) is (1.1 to 1.3):(1.1 to 1.3):1.
- 5 12. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 11 wherein the molar ratio of suitable base: $R^1O_2CCH_2X$: compound of formula (II) is 1.2:1.2:1.
13. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 12 wherein the solvent is selected from a cyclic ether, an aliphatic ethers and an aromatic solvent.
14. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 13 wherein the solvent is selected from 10 tetrahydrofuran, diethyl ether, diisopropyl ether, methyl tert-butyl ether, benzene, toluene and xylene; and a mixture of two or more of said solvents.
15. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 14 wherein the solvent is tetrahydrofuran.
16. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 15 wherein the temperature is in the 15 range -30°C to -10°C.
17. A process as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 16 wherein the temperature is in the range -25°C to -15°C.

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